

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers

Vol. 62 No. 2

June 1993

Whole No. 621

FRANK MERRIWELL "DIDN'T INHALE" EITHER!

By E. M. Sanchez-Saavedra



DIME NOVEL SKETCHES #260

LARRY DEXTER SERIES

Publisher: Garden City Publishing Co., Garden City, NY. Issues. 8. Dates: September 10, 1926, to April, 1927. Schedule: Monthly. Size: 7 7/8 x 5 1/8". Pages: 200-225. Price: Not shown (probably 15¢ to 25¢). Illustration: Colored pictorial cover. Contents: Reprints of the cloth-bound YOUNG REPORTER Series.

FRANK MERRIWELL "DIDN'T INHALE" EITHER!

By E. M. Sanchez-Saavedra

The 19th and the first quarter of the 20th was a period of intense "reform" in both Europe and America. Anti-slavery, anti-alcohol, anti-animal-abuse and anti-child-abuse advocates clamored for attention along with the pro-literacy, pro-sanitation, pro-workingman, pro-agrarian and other humanitarian lobbyists. This atmosphere of legislated and religiously-inspired social change found expression in popular literature from Dickens to Upton Sinclair to the humblest scribbler of nickel weeklies.

Writing as "Burt L. Standish," the talented and versatile Gilbert Patten (1866-1945) made the most of a unique opportunity to mold the attitudes of several generations of young Americans. In his astonishing MERRIWELL saga, which appeared weekly from 1896 to 1916, and in reprints into the 1930s, Patten managed to give his readers more than their nickel's worth of entertainment and palatable moral instruction.

Although the market for hard-covered juvenile books suitable for Christmas gifts was dominated by the "classics," the Stratemeyer Syndicate and reprints of G. A. Henty, Oliver Optic and Horatio Alger, Jr., the MERRIWELLS presented a clearer picture of virtue triumphant than any other series. Gilbert Patten daringly admitted that real human beings gambled and fixed sporting events, developed addictions to narcotics, alcohol and tobacco, engaged in illicit physical lovemaking, were mentally and physically cruel to family members, and so forth. In short, he rarely resorted to sermons about abstract "Sin" to a relatively naive audience, who wouldn't recognize its manifestations until too late. Instead, he described the kinds of criminal and immoral behavior likely to trap his flesh-and-blood readers in everyday life (with considerable lip-smacking relish, to be sure) and offered the MERRIWELL "philosophy" to help avoid pitfalls.

This philosophy was simple yet effective: Dissipation and success are incompatible. Only those who combine mental and physical vigor are fit to face and overcome life's challenges. The means to achieve a sound mind and body is clean athletic activity. Harmful substances, late hours, rich foods and vices sap vitality and destroy one's future chances. In this basic social Darwinism, Patten accurately reflected the era of Teddy Roosevelt.

Edward Stratemeyer and his syndicated ghosts could never match Gilbert Patten's vigor or the depth of his research. Patten "did his homework" meticulously in everything from obscure sports minutiae to the particulars of drug abuse. His "local color" descriptions were accurate enough to serve as guidebooks.

Where, for example, can we find in any of the 800 or so Stratemeyer offerings, passages like these:

...she puffed away at the cigarette in a manner that plainly indicated she did not fancy she was doing anything to attract attention or comment. She handled the cigarette in a familiar manner, inhaling the smoke, and the yellow stains on the fingers of her right hand completed the public confession of her habit. [Said stains were commonly referred to as "cig tracks."]

Or:

"She is a morphine fiend."

"What?"

"Dead right. Injects it into her arm with a syringe. Her pale face, the dark rings round her eyes, her queer actions—all indicate something ails her. She had to have the stuff."

(Both quotations: FRANK MERRIWELL'S OWN COMPANY, *Medal Library*, No. 304)

Unlike most moralists, who only described the effects of substance abuse as they appeared to an observer, Patten provided the user's point of view as well:

(Chester Arlington, Dick Merriwell's worst enemy at Fardale, and the brother of Dick's future wife, attempts to reform his evil and dissipated ways throughout several volumes. On this occasion he falls in with bad companions and loses his resolution again.)

The barroom odor, the sight of bottles and glasses, the seductive atmosphere, had aroused in him a strong craving which he found difficult to resist. He had fancied that enemy choked into subjection, if not wholly vanquished, but now it rose strong and fierce to grip him by the heart and take command of his will...

There was a high flush on Arlington's cheeks, and his eyes glittered.

"I'll have just one," he muttered, "just one. Give me rye, barkeeper."

Arlington felt the whiskey electrifying him in the manner he anticipated, but, while in advance he had fancied he would stop with one drink, he now experienced a double desire for more. In the early days of his indulgence a single drink had seemed sufficient to nerve him for anything, but, as the enemy took possession of him and asserted itself, he gradually came to require double the original amount...

In the height of his wild-oats sowing, Arlington had regarded the first drink as a bracer, the second as a steadier, and those which followed as producers of nerve, energy and determination.

After he has been fleeced at cards and beaten up by a villain, Dick rescues him, gets him to a druggist and sobers him up. "A short time later, in a back alley, Chet was very sick indeed."

(DICK MERRIWELL, FRESHMAN, *Merriwell Series*, No. 142)

Narcotics addiction, next to venereal disease one of the Victorian era's best-kept secrets, often resulted from the use of opiates for surgical anaesthesia and postoperative painkillers. Before the U. S. Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, even "harmless" over-the-counter headache powders and baby "soothing syrups" were laced with cocaine and laudanum. (The Bayer pharmaceutical company had recently marketed heroin as a cough remedy!) Patten included these in several of his nickel parables as well.

A favorite theme of many detective stories was the smashing of Chinese opium rings in large cities like San Francisco. The average reader of nickel libraries knew that addicts had a "yen yen" (Yuan Wang) or craving for the Ya Pien Yen (opium). The brass box (Ho Tzu) or "Hop Toy" in pidgin, containing the drug, led to expressions like "hitting the hop" and "hophead." (See Frank Tousey's *Secret Service*, No. 294: THE BRADYS AND THE HOP HITTERS; OR, AMONG THE OPIUM FIENDS OF 'FRISCO. Sept. 9, 1904.)

DICK MERRIWELL'S STAYING POWER, elaborates on Harold Du Boise, a particularly loathsome character, who is addicted to morphine, cocaine, opium and absinthe (the French concoction distilled from wormwood or anise, associated with Toulouse Lautrec's cafe society). After taking morphine and lighting a cigarette,

...yellow and jaundiced, Du Boise was shrunk in the arms of a huge easy-

chair like a shriveled banana...in a dreamy, comatose state.

"I've just been on a trip to Venice," breathed Du Boise, filling his lungs and slowly exhaling the smoke as he spoke. "Venice is the city of dreams, you know."

This is closer to Oscar Wilde than Horatio Alger.

In #149, DICK MERRIWELL'S BACKERS, Du Boise and his cronies, thinking they have just murdered Dick Merriwell, are soothing their nerves in the back room of Fred's Saloon. Du Boise orders an absinthe frappe.

"It's a deadly poison," said Ditson. "I see that they're trying to pass a law in France that will make the manufacture of absinthe unlawful in one year and the sale unlawful in two years. Absinthe is one of the most potent influences in the degeneracy of the drinking people of France."

"I need it this minute," returns Du Boise, "it works like a magic charm. Gradually all the shadows disperse and flee away, the sun smiles upon you and the weeds beneath your feet blossom into the most lovely flowers...From a dark and dreary cave the world changes into a glorious, heaven-smiling paradise..."

"I don't mind telling you, fellows, that I've tried almost everything. Opium works nicely in a way, but it seems to interest you rather too much in other people...the most trivial things are sufficient to amuse you."

"Other drugs with which I have experimented produce different effects, but they all bring about a relapse in time, and you suffer the most horrible tortures in retaliation for the pleasures that have been yours."

"I began experimenting with opium for amusement. I wanted to experience the effect. I had no idea of letting the stuff get a hold on me, but when I found it had I fled to absinthe, and absinthe has proved my salvation."

"It will prove your destruction," declared Duncan. "You're its slave today, and you'll never break away from it."

Prophetic words; a few volumes later, Harold is dead of an overdose.

In 1898 and 1906, respectively, when *Tip-Top* readers first encountered these concrete examples of vice, they were almost certainly shocked (and mildly titillated). Yet by the end of the stories, the brothers Merriwell had either reformed the errant characters by force of personal example; "hating the sin, not the sinner," or else cosmic justice prevails and the villain causes his own death. "Sport" Harris drowns, Evan Hartwick's tobacco-weakened heart infarcts, and dozens of assorted heavies bite the dust from "lead poisoning" and "suspended sentences."

Patten attacked other social evils from his *Tip-Top* podium: plausible confidence schemes, economic injustice and racial/ethnic prejudice. After backing Joe Cohen, a Jewish Yale student, for a position on the varsity baseball team, we find the following comment from a bigot in DICK MERRIWELL'S STAND (*New Medal Library*, No. 694), of 1908:

"Of course Merriwell claims that race prejudice shouldn't be permitted to enter into baseball...He would be willing to play with a colored man on the team if the fellow was good at the game."

Although dialect humor and stereotypes figured heavily in all boys' weeklies, *Tip-Top* included, Patten managed to defuse its harmful effect by constant examples of tolerance and fair play. The Merriwells associate closely with blacks, native Americans, Jews, Hispanics, and other minorities. Ephraim Gallup, himself a butt of "daown East" dialect japes ("I wisht I wuz to hum on th' farm") courts a succession of dark-eyed Latin-American beauties, and eventually marries Teresa, the daughter of a re-

formed Mexican bandit. Barney Mulloy's sister Biddy is married to an Armenian, while Jack Diamond, the "hotblooded, fire-eating Virginian," wins the hand of Juliet Reynolds, an English girl. Toots, Frank's uncle's black servant, is a figure of fun, but a brave and important member of the swarming cast of characters.

The most powerful taboo was against sex as a subject matter, but the MERRIWELL stories even managed to explore this area, albeit in a round-about fashion. As early as 1896 we find Frank stealing kisses from Inza Burrage. "His arms were still about her, and he held her close to his beating heart." Poor Dick Rover had to wait from 1899 to 1916 for a chaste kiss from Dora Stanhope! And this was only after their formal engagement. Gilbert Patten made no bones about Frank Merriwell's irresistible fascination to young ladies, an interest which was often returned in kind. For several years, Patten had Frank playing Inza against the shy Elsie Bellwood. Readers sent hundreds of letters to the "Applause" column to argue why Fran should choose one or the other. At Yale, Frank began to date Miss Winnie Lee of New Haven, who eventually marries Buck Badger, yet another reformed enemy.

The sequence of stories concerning Frank's theatrical career in 1898 was perhaps the most "adult" of the series before Dick Merriwell appeared on the scene. Frank's stage manager is married to an adventuress, yet is carrying on a romance with the company's tragic "soubrette," who is a morphine addict. Bart Hodge becomes infatuated with an "older woman," much as he had become entangled with a female counterfeiter in an earlier story.

The flip side of "connubial bliss" even provides comic relief in the misadventures of Fardale professor Hyson Jenks and his shrewish wife Nancy.

While at Yale, Frank has numerous unpleasant encounters with the "Rupert Chickering set," a group of "wannabe" Oscar Wilde/Aubrey Beardsley aesthetes. Although homosexuality is never mentioned, this effeminate group provided a classic stereotype of "unmanliness," sipping wine in perfumed apartments and lispng petty gossip.

The eternal struggle of wills between parent and child figures largely in a number of episodes, particularly those dealing with Frank Merriwell's experimental school. In FRANK MERRIWELL'S ENCOURAGEMENT (*New Medal Library*, No. 712) from 1909, Patten detailed his theories of the proper form of education. In summary, he believed that education should be tailored to the individual, and not the other way round, if the system were to produce useful members of society. Forcing a child whose talents lie in manual pursuits into classical studies was little short of criminal. All useful labor is honorable, said Patten, and each citizen is a unique entity, with individual tastes and skills. The trick was to expose children to a wide variety of experiences in order to identify and develop those skills.

One story contains an episode in which a deacon's daughter first becomes interested in boys. Her crabbed father forbids her to attend a chaperoned dance at Frank Merriwell's school, but her mother intercedes:

"More girls have been sp'iled by their folks refusin' to let them have any company than has been sp'iled by havin' decent, respectable fellers escort them to parties...When a girl gits the idee in her head that she's being abused by her folks she's treadin' on dangerous ground, for she's almost sartin to do something sly and underhanded, and in this way she learns to disobey and deceive and become a hypocrite...

"I don't want our Sadie to become no hypocrite. She's allus been brought up to confide in me...I believe that's the safe way to bring up

a girl..."

(FRANK MERRIWELL'S PUPILS, *Merriwell Series*, No. 133)

I seriously doubt if Edward Stratemeyer could have summoned up the courage to admit that proper young ladies could ever deceive their parents, or that proper Victorian/Edwardian parents could ever allow their children to confide in them. *Tip-Top Weekly* provided another outlet as well: its "Applause" column. Young readers often unbosomed themselves of their innermost worries, much as modern readers of "Ann Landers" still do.

A boy, signing himself "D.E.," blurted that "my mother, like all mothers, I suppose, expects a great deal from me, and one of her daily lectures is for me to conceal all emotion as much as possible. And quite a number of lectures I get on account of *Tip-Top*. While reading them, if I am not laughing, I am at the verge of tears...if one of your stories were read to a door-post it would be 'moved.'" (*Tip-Top Weekly*, No. 175, FRANK MERRIWELL'S FALL, August 19, 1899.)

Having had considerable personal experience in camping and the responsible use of firearms, I was always amused by the Harry Castlemon, Mayne Reid and Edward Stratemeyer stories of outdoor sport, in which Our Young Heroes slaughter every furry, feathered or finned creature which crosses their path. (Also, sleeping in an unheated tent with the thermometer hovering around zero is not the fun activity lightheartedly described in most series books.)

Gilbert Patten (the "bloodthirsty dime novelist") took a far more humane stand on promiscuous hunting. In FRANK MERRIWELL'S CRUISE (1898), Frank and Bruce Browning are in the Maine woods, when Frank idly pots a squirrel.

"If I could make such a shot as that I'd be proud of it," comments Bruce.

"I'm not proud, only sorry," said Frank. "Look at this little fellow. A few moments ago he was full of life, happy and free; now he is dead, killed by a cruel brute of a man! I didn't think I'd hit him, but that is no excuse. I ought not to have tried. He is dead and I killed him. Bruce, this one thoughtless, hasty act of mine lies like a sore weight on my conscience. I'll not forget it in a week. It will trouble me—it will haunt me."

"Oh, it's nothing to make a fuss over..."

"Yes it is. That little squirrel never harmed me, but I murdered him. He was one of God's creatures, and I have no right to lift my hand against him."

Both Merriwell's have an enduring love of all animals and deplore the near-extinction of many species. In 1897, Frank hunts bison in Yellowstone Park—with a camera! (The stories collected in FRANK MERRIWELL'S HUNTING TOUR and the next six *Tip-Tops*, which were never reprinted, are something of an anomaly, written before Patten crystallized the MERRIWELL character end ethos.) More typical is Frank's adoption of a half-starved cat as the mascot for his theatrical company.

When it came to physical violence, Patten was trapped by a market which demanded action. He compromised by making the Merriwells invincible in a fair fight yet inserting little homilies about the senseless brutality of "scrapping." The brothers fight only when attacked, and then go at it hammer-and-tongs. Many a tough bruiser sat up groggily, demanding, "W'at did he 'tump me wid—a rock?" after attempting to "do up" a Merriwell.

The evil of gambling provided a recurring object lesson throughout the series. We learn that even Frank has inherited a passion for games of

chance from his father. By dint of constant struggle, he overcomes his temptation and repeatedly exposes crooked card sharps. Professional athletics, popularized by the *National Police Gazette*, attracted smarmy "sporting" types who enjoyed the cheesecake "girlie" pictures provided by Richard K. Fox as much as the graphic accounts of bare-knuckle prize fights and mayhem on the gridiron. Early pro baseball teams acquired unsavory reputations as well, culminating in the "Black Sox" scandal of 1919. Many of the MERRIWELL plots involve gamblers who attempt to drug or cripple the star athlete, or drag his friends into ruin.

Because the series ground on, week after week, for two decades, there is a fair amount of repetitiveness, and critics can find many lapses in continuity. Compared with the *Tip-Top* canon, the average Dickens novel is downright underpopulated, so these minor slips were easily forgiven. For example, both Frank and his later wife Inza were unsure of their respective fathers' first names. In FRANK MERRIWELL'S SCHOOL DAYS, Frank's sire is named "Harton Merriwell," while Inza's papa is "Noel Burrage." Subsequent stories identify them as "Charles Conrad Merriwell" and "Bernard Burrage." A Fardale student named Phil Hawkins in the same book is later referred to as Phil Haskins. When he reappears in a later book, it is as Brian Hawkins. And so on.

Everyday details of life from 1896 to 1916 are as painstaking as everything else. In FRANK MERRIWELL'S CHUMS, we learn that Fardale cadets kept the broom and slop-bucket behind the door. Although nobody ever has to use a restroom in either Patten's or Stratemeyer's books, at least Frank Merriwell has the facilities available should the need arise. Dick Rover does not.

Students of American slang expressions can find a gold mine of linguistic gems in the MERRIWELL saga. Patten was equally adept at sports jargon, thieves' and gamblers' argot, street phrases and collegiate humor: Someone with "cold feet" had the "frosty trilbys;" to get it "in the neck" could be expressed as "where Maggie wore the beads." Now, wouldn't THAT jar you? But that was the kind of hairpin Frank was. (When he wasn't crusading for fair play or winning the Yale-Harvard game at the last minute, Frank was an unabashed practical joker and punster, and Patten gave his young audience hundreds of corny jokes and comic poems.)

Recently, Sears, Roebuck & Co. announced the demise of their thick "wish book," which first appeared in 1896, as did the first issue of *Tip-Top Library*. In a sense, this necessary economy measure symbolizes the end of one era and the beginning of another. Let it be more hopeful and happy than the one ushered in by the immortal Yale superhero.

* * * * *

Night Owl Books

P.O. Box 2232-D • Woodbridge, VA 22193

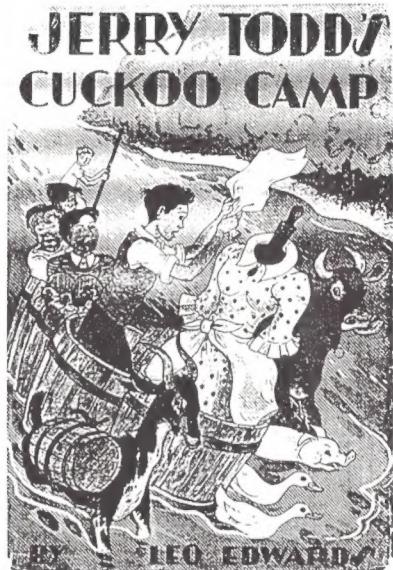
BUYING

- ONE ITEM OR ENTIRE COLLECTION -

COMIC BOOKS • Movie Posters • RADIO PREMIUMS
Pulp MAGAZINES • PIN-UPS • CARTOON COLLECTIBLES
ORIGINAL ARTWORK • Circus Items • VINTAGE EROTICA

- and all related memorabilia -





COMPELLING COVER CUTIES

By Rocco Musemeche

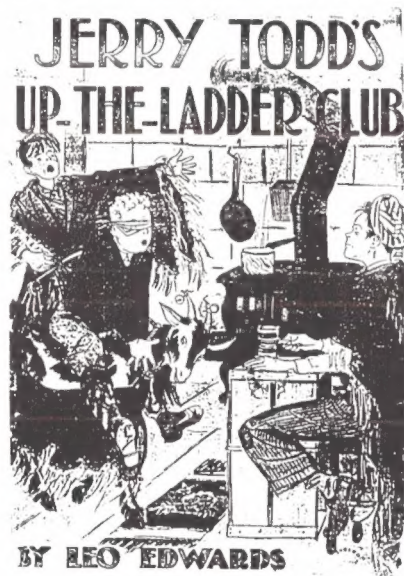
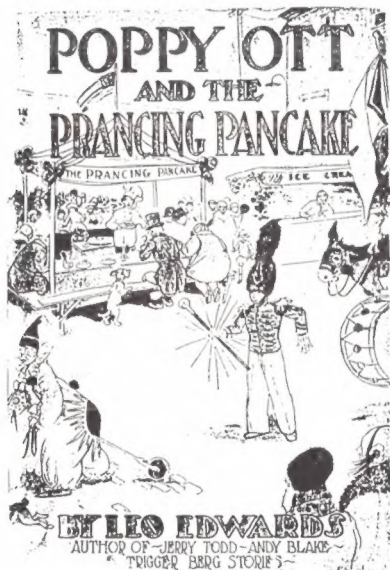
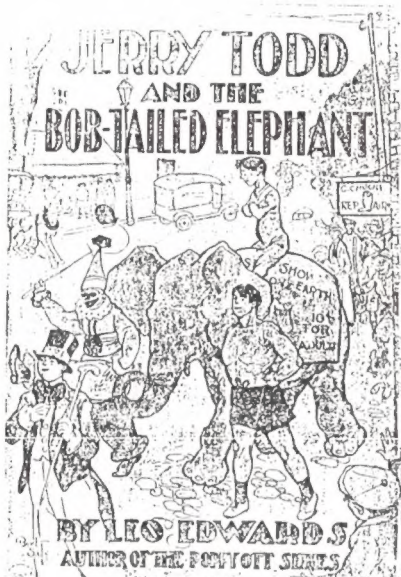
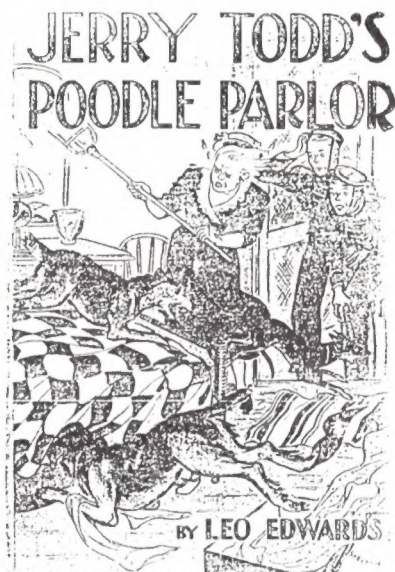
Leo Edwards and Bert Salg, a writer and an illustrator, teamed up from 1921 to 1939 to simultaneously rub Alladin's Lamp and the funny-bone of juvenile America via the JERRY TODD and POPPY OTT books. It was a wonderfully successful continuity covering 27 volumes in two series.

Boys and girls back then as well as today (and you may include adults) happily recall hilarious adventures sparked by some far-fetched but delightful mystery in or about the environs of Tutter, a town whose peace is inevitably restored through the heroics of our two youthful paladins, Jerry and Poppy, aided by their chums.

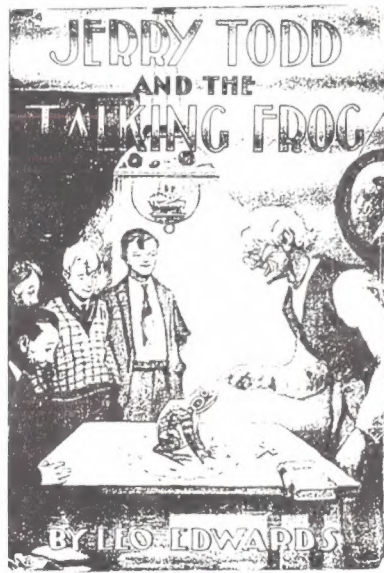
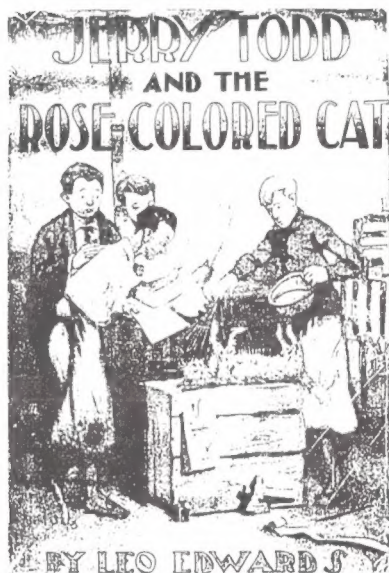
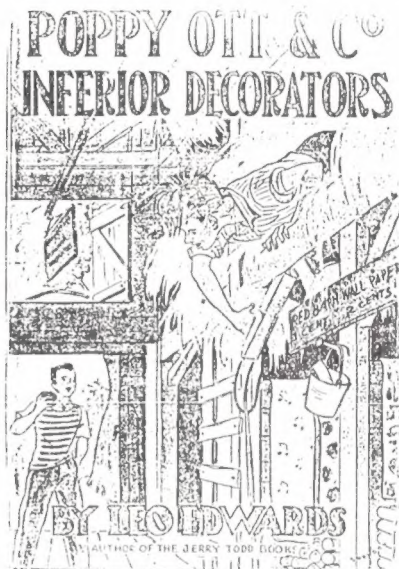
These highly popular books were usually obtained in a Holiday season through the thoughtful consideration of grandma, grandpa, dad or mom. Sometimes a book or two arrived courtesy of a friend as a birthday gift, or showed up coincidentally with a bout of the flu or a tonsillectomy. In every instance the books were received with great delight.

Today a tidalwave of collectors make up the bulk of buyers and at times paying pretty demanding prices. Most dealers acknowledge it is difficult to keep up with the hunger for those enclosed in dust-jackets.

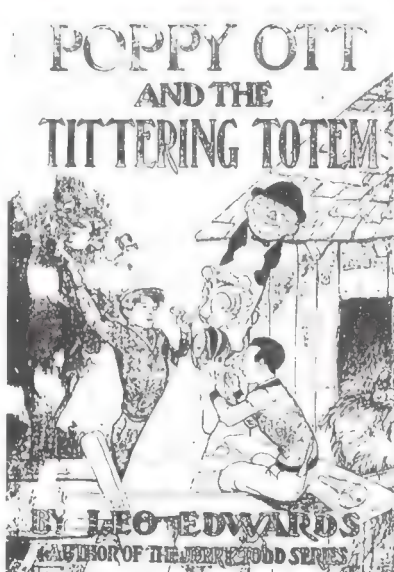
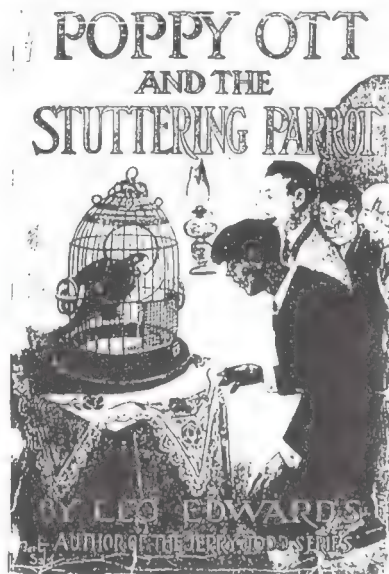
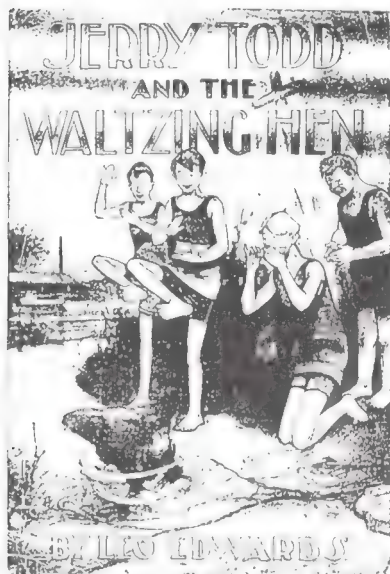
The popularity of JERRY TODD and POPPY OTT is also reflected in not only the "ol' timer's" reaction to snapping up dustjacketed volumes, but by the army of newcomers hot on the hunt for them. It is not just a nostalgic drive that encourages the feverish pursuit. Just what made them click? Why the unabated interest? What was their appeal based upon? Did their unusual or perhaps outlandish titles have something to do with it? Were the harum-scarum adventures of our frolicsome heroes the type readers yearned for? Was it the titled illustrations of artist Bert Salg? Did author and illustrator conspire to further win approval of the buyer with a gimmick, if you please?



With the magic spell of colorful characters, strange titles and unusual illustrations already freely given, Edwards and Salg combined to keep the magic going with the addition of a full run of the cutest animals ever to grace the dust-jackets of any book. They gave free rein in giving

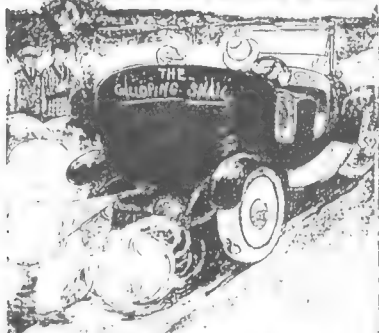


animals a break in book after book and these cute animals produced by the deft brush strokes of Salg compelled the book-buyer's hand to pluck from the variety on the shelf the one with the lovable looking animal. And elderly citizens got a break, too. That combination spelled sales!



On eighteen of the twenty-seven books a deliberate focus is given these cute representatives of the animal kingdom, and if we are to judge from the cover with the most cuties, top honors would be snared by JERRY TODD'S CUCKOO CAMP, bountifully comprised of familiar farm friends such

POPPY OTT AND THE GALLOPING SNAIL



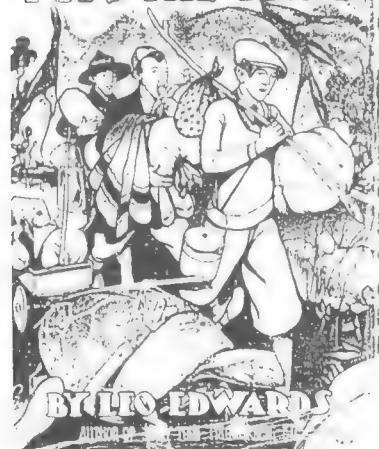
BY LEO EDWARDS
AUTHOR OF THE JERRY TODD SERIES

POPPY OTT AND THE FRECKLED GOLDFISH



BY LEO EDWARDS
AUTHOR OF THE JERRY TODD SERIES

POPPY OTT HITS THE TRAIL



BY LEO EDWARDS

JERRY TODD CAVEMAN



BY LEO EDWARDS
AUTHOR OF POPPY OTT-ANDY BLIME-TRIGGER BEEB-ETC.

as a goat, cow, pig, two ducks, and three chickens, along with JERRY TODD, EDITOR-IN-GRIEF, which displays a bedlam of scurrying felines, thirteen in number if we count one streaking in a blur over the window sill.

The animal parade continues in JERRY TODD'S POODLE PARLOR, with a

four-dog stampede under the glare of two bewildered bellhops, while JERRY TODD AND THE BOB-TAILED ELEPHANT features a horse, a dog and an elephant.

POPPY OTT AND THE PRANCING PANCAKE offers a nostalgic touch in its tableau of a thin man and a fat woman seated at a pancake booth as a dog on his hind legs begs for a handout. Another pooch scampers along before a clown in a parade, while a patient donkey follows a baton-twirling drum-major. A pigeon perched atop a flagpole surveys the entire scene.

Oddly enough a goat is utilized on the cover of JERRY TODD'S UP-THE-LADER CLUB, while the spine of POPPY OTT & CO., INFERIOR DECORATORS provides the area to spotlight Flossie the cow, while JERRY TODD AND THE FLYING FLAPDOODLE relies on a charging bull plus two domesticated geese soaring blithely overhead.

Three JERRY TODD books, ROSE-COLORED CAT, TALKING FROG, and WALTZING HEN, and two POPPY OTT books, STUTTERING PARROT, and MONKEY'S PAW, depict a cat, frog, hen, parrot and monkey, while POPPY OTT AND THE TITTING TOTEM stick to the script in sporting a bear and a large pelican-like bird.

The artist veers off from the author's supervision to mildly endanger the coincidental relationship on the cover of POPPY OTT AND THE GALLOPING SNAIL which does *not* give master snail a break. Instead a wee turkey, befuddled by his place in the sun, rears up to survey his surroundings from the back seat of a flivver!

POPPY OTT AND THE FRECKLED GOLDFISH gives a humorous aspect to a pooch scampering across a downtown Tutter street between the Charm Beauty Parlor and the Elite Beauty Parlor, right next to a Chinese laundry, giving the impression of a host of clean and beautiful folks residing in that midwestern town. Adding to that image is the figure of the laundryman hurrying along with two neatly wrapped bundles bearing inscriptions in Chinese. The goldfish appears twice, once on a sign projecting out from the laundry that clearly states, "The freckled goldfish is here," and it swims serenely in a bowl displayed in the window.

How about that large turtle taking up almost half of the bottom of the dust-jacket of POPPY OTT HITS THE TRAIL, as it lumbers off to nowhere in particular?

Our own favorite? We find the appeal strongest in JERRY TODD CAVE-MAN, inhabited by a goat, two pigs, a donkey, a parrot and a monkey in a most attractive and colorful dust-jacket with humor flying off in every direction.

One thing for sure, we know of no other juvenile series books of those years that gave animals such exposure in a truly artistic dimension.

Thank you Leo Edwards and Bert Salg, for those 55 or so compelling cover cuties.

* * * * *

RECENTLY PUBLISHED BOOK OF INTEREST TO COLLECTORS

A FICTIVE PEOPLE, by Ronald J. Zboray; Oxford University Press, 200 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016, 326 pages. A scholarly history of publishing, distribution, and the readership of books in the United States during the antibellum period. A good foundation to the publishing explosion following the Civil War. \$45.

* * * * *

WANTED

FRANK READES IN FRANK READE LIBRARY
WIDE AWAKE LIBRARY AND FRANK READE WEEKLY

WANTED

Peter Shelley, Box 2142, Cupertino, CA 95015

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN, THE DIME NOVEL IS DEAD?"

TWO DIME NOVEL REVIEWS

By J. Randolph Cox

Recently I have come across two books which indicate that the dime novel is not really as forgotten an example of fiction of the past as some people may think. Each is an example of the way dime novels continue to enrich our lives even today, either as social history or as entertainment. One is a reprint of a dime novel set within a specific era in American history, the other is an extension of that old myth that reading dime novels can give you funny ideas. Each is worth taking the time to search it out.

DEADWOOD DICK AND THE CODE OF THE WEST, by Bruce H. Thorstad (New York: Pocket Books, 1991; \$3.95) is the story of two individuals who come together during the days of the Old West and are forever changed by the encounter. Everything that Mortimer Ridley Chalmers III of Philadelphia knew about the West he had learned by reading the stories of DEADWOOD DICK in the pages of *Beadle's Half Dime Library*. He left home for the Black Hills of South Dakota to find the world that he had read about only to discover that reality and fiction were somewhat at odds with each other. Coffee Arbuckle knew the West first hand having been a veteran of the Civil War and was in the Black Hills in search of gold. A black man, he was nicknamed "Deadwood Dick" after he had prevented a stagecoach from being held up. Young Mortimer was certain that the Deadwood Dick he had read about was real since he kept hearing people refer to a man by that name working a claim in the hills. Then he met his hero's counterpart in the flesh and did not quite know what to believe anymore.

The book is well-written, the settings are vivid, and the characters have depth to them. As in life there are disappointments and some of the most interesting characters do not live to the end of the story. This is an excellent example of a sub-genre in western fiction in which the world of the dime novel plays a significant part in the action. Sometimes the story features a writer of dime novels who goes west to gather background information for his fiction; sometimes one character reads dime novels and contrasts fact with fiction; sometimes an historic figure is made aware of his or her notoriety when he or she comes upon an example of a dime novel loosely based on real life. Here the fiction and the reality are put into stark contrast with each other as Mortimer grows up all too quickly and Coffee learns that true-life gunplay can be overdone.

FAIRGROUND FICTION, edited by Donald K. Hartman (Kenmore, New York: Motif Press, an imprint of Epoch Books, 1992) is the first in a series called "Themes and Settings in Fiction." In keeping with the dime novel tradition, its sub-title, "Detective Stories of the World's Columbian Exposition," explains a lot. Its 450 pages contain complete reprints of AGAINST ODDS: A DETECTIVE STORY, by Lawrence L. Lynch (the pseudonym of Emma Murdoch Van Deventer) originally published by Ward, Lock of London in 1894, and CHICAGO CHARLIE, THE COLUMBIAN DETECTIVE, by Lieut. A. K. Sims (the pseudonym of John H. Whitson) originally published as *Beadle's New York Dime Library*, #776, September 6, 1893.

The book includes a perceptive introduction by Carl Smith, Associate Professor of English and American Culture at Northwestern, in which he discusses the significance of the Exposition of 1893 and the way in which both of these novels reflect popular interest in the World's Fair. Illustrated with period photographs and supplemented with notes about the authors and an annotated bibliography of other examples of World's Fair fiction, the book serves as a practical textbook in how dime novels (and

other popular fiction) can illuminate and explicate our past. It is a delight to hold a dime novel in the hand, text reset and printed on good paper, that will not crumble at the touch. In such a setting CHICAGO CHARLIE can be read and enjoyed for its story as well as a document in popular social history. (Copies can be obtained by sending \$15.95, plus \$2.50 postage and handling, checks or money orders, to Epoch Books, 22 Bron Ave., Buffalo, NY 14223)

* * * * *

LETTER

I've often wondered why Street & Smith decided not to include *Tip Tops* #33-39 in any of their reprint editions. I have #36, FRANK MERRIWELL IN JAPAN, and it's good. In the back of my cluttered mind is a desire to publish a "thick book" edition, a la Jack Rudman, of the missing adventures. Don't know if I'll ever do it, but it's fun to consider. Every time someone tries to revive FRANK MERRIWELL, the "politically correct" market doesn't seem to support the notion.

Using a bad cold in December as an excuse, I started reading in order the 56 paperback and 28 McKay hardback MERRIWELLS that I've acquired in the past 30 years. Aside from the major gaps in my collection, the saga reads well, and shows a tremendous evolution of Patten's style and self-confidence. Although the later ones are not as dime-novelish action-oriented, Patten was able to preach his philosophy to a receptive audience. His courage in advocating racial and religious tolerance, nature conservation and unswerving fair play was nothing short of amazing. His daringly accurate descriptions of drug and alcohol addiction, crooked gambling, and various other social ills are fully as powerful as anything Dickens ever produced.

Mike Saavedra
3517 Moss Side Ave.
Richmond, VA 23222

* * * * *

W A N T E D

Edgar Rice Burroughs, TARZAN, MARS, etc., hardback books,
radio premiums, toys, etc.

WILL PURCHASE FOR IMMEDIATE CASH OR TRADE.

Send condition, publisher, and price to:

JIM GERLACH

2206 GREENBRIER

IRVING, TX 75060

Telephone 214 790-0922

ITEMS FOR TRADE:

ROY BLAKELY SERIES (14 books; 6 in dust-jackets)

RADIO BOYS SERIES (6 books; 3 in dust-jackets)

SOME SPECIAL DIME NOVEL WANTS

WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE (in Dime Novel Format)

(continuation of NEW BUFFALO BILL WEEKLY)

1919-#357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363.

(change to Pulp Magazine Format)

#365, 367 (still carrying BUFFALO BILL reprints)

1919-1920 All Issues (Magazine Format)

WIDE AWAKE LIBRARY

Issues with FRANK READE stories

BOY'S STAR LIBRARY

Issues with JACK WRIGHT stories

PLUCK AND LUCK (1898-1929)

Issues with JACK WRIGHT stories

Any issue with a LOST RACE story

MYSTERY MAGAZINE (Frank Tousey Co.)

1917-1919 Issues in Dime Novel Format

1920-1926 Some in Dime Novel Format

Became Pulp Magazine Size in 1924

FRANK READE LIBRARY and FRANK READE WEEKLY MAGAZINE

All Issues

TOP NOTCH

1910-1911 The early Dime Novel Format Issues

Darrell C. Richardson

899 Stonewall Street

Memphis, TN 38107

* * * * *

COMPLETE SETS OF SERIES BOOKS—SOLD ONLY AS COMPLETE SETS

Frank Webster	WEBSTER SERIES	25 volumes complete
Frank Walton	FLYING MACHINE BOYS	6 volumes complete
Marvin West	MOTOR RANGERS	6 volumes complete
Paul Tomlinson	BOOK COOK STORIES	4 volumes complete

\$1.00 each volume—you pay postage

Rev. Donald L. Steinhauer

R. D. #1, Box 1468, Nescopeck, PA 18635

717 379-3991

* * * * *

FOR SALE BY

EDWARD T. LeBLANC, 87 SCHOOL STREET, FALL RIVER, MA 02720

Satisfaction Guaranteed or Money Refunded. Postage Extra.

\$1.00 for one item, \$1.50 for two.

PLUCK AND LUCK (Frank Tousey, Pub.) 1898-1929
colored cover, 8 x 11", 32 pages

#698	Wrecked in an Unknown Sea; or, Cast on a Mysterious Island.	G.	\$3.00
#699	Hal Hart of Harvard; or, College Life at Cambridge.	G.	\$3.00
		mended at spine, G.	\$3.00
#700	Dauntless Young Douglas; or, The Prisoners of the Isle.	G.	\$3.00
		mended at spine, G.	\$3.00
#705	Captain Thunder; or, The Boy Treasure Hunters of Robber's Reef.		
		some water stains, G.	\$3.00
#712	Appointed to West Point, or, Fighting His Own Way.	G.	\$3.00